



# A little Learning is a dang'rous Thing; Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian Spring<sup>1</sup>.

— Alexander Pope<sup>2</sup>

While many people are familiar with metadata, which is information about information, and widely used to manage content in cyberspace, few understand the realm of *pseudo-knowledge*, where a little learning is not only not a dangerous thing, but in fact constitutes the most effective form of just-in-time transfer of intellectual property ever devised. Consider the pseudo-knowledge for the Capability Maturity Model<sup>®</sup> (CMM)<sup>3</sup> that was carefully crafted by its authors nearly two decades ago (whether they knew it or not), supporting countless presentations to senior managers in which software engineering process group chairs want to familiarize them with the CMM, but don't want them to know enough to be dangerous:

1. The CMM has five maturity levels (so you can count them on one hand, boss).
2. Those five maturity levels have 18 key process areas (just like the 18 holes on the golf course you're going to play this afternoon with that potential client).
3. Those 18 key process areas have 52 goals to achieve (just as there are 52 cards in the deck you'll use to play poker at the 19th hole, after your 18-hole round of golf).
4. Those 52 goals are satisfied through the implementation of 316 key practices (which is almost 317, or if presented as 3/17 would be recognized as March 17<sup>th</sup>, which as we all know is St. Patrick's Day, and a fine representative for the beer to be consumed at the 19<sup>th</sup> hole while you play poker with a deck of 52 cards after finishing the 18 holes of golf and shaking hands with your now new client with that firm senior manager handshake using all five fingers! However, since we only have 316 key practices, we'll just have to remember St. Patrick's Day eve, which would then of course be March 16<sup>th</sup>, or 3/16).

Thus, through effective presentation of pseudo-knowledge, your senior manager has information relevant to the CMM with which he or she can amuse his or her peers, family, and friends at cocktail parties without being dangerous to you, the process improvement lead!

Now, however, with the transition to the CMM Integration<sup>SM</sup> (CMMI<sup>®</sup>), this treasure trove of pseudo-knowledge is soon to be rendered obsolete! Useless! Pointless! The question of the hour is this: What shall be the pseudo-knowledge associated with the

CMMI? How is a poor process lead to portray relevant but useless information about the CMMI to management, friends, family, and neighbors? Where do you start? Staged, continuous, or constageduous? Software only? Software and systems engineering? How about Integrated Product and Process Development (IPPD) and supplier sourcing? Six capability levels or five maturity levels? Where to begin? While it is true that each representation has 25 process areas and 55 specific goals, just what do you do with all those generic goals and practices? And how do you account for the difference in specific practices (189 vs. 185)? Do you even attempt to address the bodies of knowledge incorporated, the different dimensions, or the categories of process areas? Inquiring minds want to know!

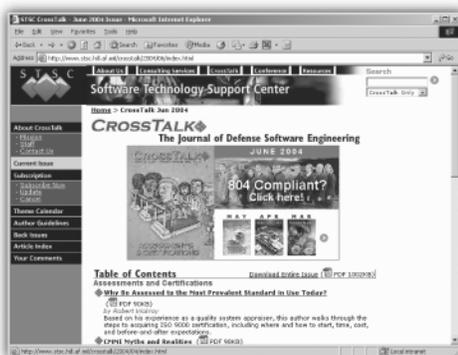
Earlier this year, Pat O'Toole calculated that there are 4.7 x 10<sup>18</sup> possible capability level profiles across all 24 process areas in the CMMI for Systems Engineering, Software Engineering and IPPD Vers. 1.1 since each may be performed at any one of the six possible capability levels<sup>4</sup>. How exactly do you think we'll capture that little tidbit in pseudo-knowledge?

To this end, I hope the process improvement community will accept the challenge to identify the new pseudo-knowledge for the CMMI. How should we represent this fascinating tool in all its glory and splendor without sharing anything of real meaning or value? How shall we endeavor to entertain and amuse without compromising our positions as organizational leaders of process improvement? Put on your pseudo-thinking caps and send me your best! We'll select the finalists from all entries submitted to me by Oct. 29, and let the community pick the winners at the CMMI conference in Denver, Colo., Nov. 15-18.

— Barry Schrimsher  
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1. The American Heritage<sup>®</sup> Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition. 2000. Pierian Spring NOUN: 1. *Greek Mythology* A spring in Macedonia, sacred to the Muses. 2. A source of inspiration.
2. Pope, Alexander. *Poetry and Prose of Alexander Pope*. Houghton Mifflin Co., 1 June 1969.
3. Adapted with permission from a tale shared by Pat O'Toole of Process Assessment, Consulting, & Training, LLC.
4. O'Toole, Pat. "Do's and Don'ts of Process Improvement, #18: Don't Maintain a Low Profile." 3 Apr. 2004.

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